

V. PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

DEACON CORESI'S IMAGE IN HISTORICAL RECORDS

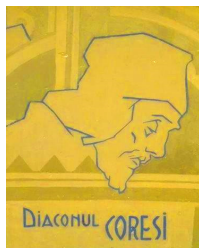
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ABSTRACT. Coresi, member of the clergy ordained in the first rank of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, settled in Brasov in 1559, printed fundamental religious books in Romanian for more than 20 years. This remarkable and valuable person whose statute has been captured in written documents or fine arts portrayals, opened *the way for writing in Romanian*, and the Coresian image has been known and appreciated, especially starting from the 18th century until now, due to researches in the field of history, theology and fine arts. As a text translator or translation reviser, Coresi has been studied and is still under the attention of our researchers of old literature. Deacon Coresi's image can be traced in time in various creations in the fine arts field.

Keywords: Coresi, arts, literature, old Romanian writing, religious books

"And because I read and saw that everything explains, confirms and endorses the Holy Bible, I liked that very much and I wrote words with the printing press for thee, Romanian brothers, so thee can learn from these and I ask thee to read and contemplate because thee shall see it for yourselves that those are the jewel and thee shall find in them a hidden treasure...."

Deacon Coresi



Detail from the lower part of the composition „*Cultural history of Transylvania*” by Costin Petrescu, 1939, Great Hall, Universitarilor Palace, Cluj-Napoca.

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Shortly after the printing press had been introduced in Romania in the 16th century, a group of scholar typographers emerged: hieromonk Macarie, Dimitrie Liubavici – Târgoviște, Filip the Moldavian, with his activities ensuring access to new scholastic ways in Sibiu and Deacon Coresi with his cultural group in Brasov, a core source of printed texts meant to enlighten the entire nation.

The researchers of deacon Coresi's life and activity († 1583, Brasov) state that he learnt the art of printing from apprentices expatriated in harsh circumstances – possibly even from Serbian monks who had brought to the Romanian lands bits of printed texts produced in Venice. We could also mention that the business relationships established with some public figures of those times in Ardeal, Transylvanian Saxons, Hungarians, Lutherans or Calvinists, make him the first diplomat in the typography industry from Romania.

Coresi, member of the clergy ordained in the first rank of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, settled in Brasov in 1559, printed fundamental religious books in Romanian for more than 20 years. He became a religious book publisher, under the impulse of the new reform movement started by Luther and first of all stood out as an important typographer and then as a book merchant for earning his living. The deacon's laborious activity evolved from associate to freelancer and then to religious printing press owner¹. Evidence supporting this can be found in documents from Brasov where we discover that on December, 12, 1573 "*the Bishop's deacon, the typographer, together with 4 people*" arrived in Brasov "*for a printing press*" and stayed there for 5 days for discussion with the local hierarch²; in terms of the veracity of his origins in Targoviste his own testimony in the epilogue of the Romanian Gospel printed in Brasov in 1560/1561 stands as proof and also some other forewords to Coresi's books³. Deacon Coresi's image can be traced in time in various creations in the fine arts field. Thus, we can mention the statue in Saint Nicholas Church's yard in Scheii Brasovului, a stone sculpture by Ion Meiu and also the bust made by sculptor Sorin Tomșa, sheltered in the Museum "The First Romanian School" in Piata Unirii, Brasov.

Another depiction of Coresi's image can be seen in the mural painting in the Great Hall of Universitarilor Palace, Cluj-Napoca. The pictorial composition made by artist Costin Petrescu in 1939, shows Coresi next to great Romanian cultural personalities from Transylvania. The composition is called "*Cultural History of Transylvania*" and spans on three large mural surfaces on the stage background⁴.

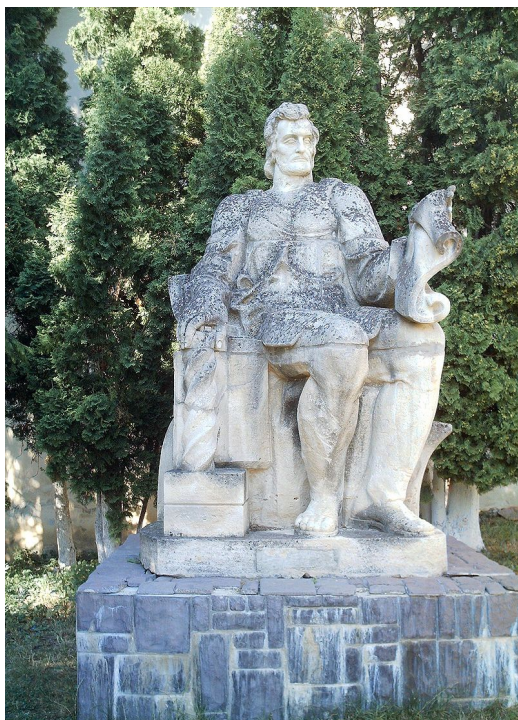
¹ Vasile Oltean, Historical and Religious Configuration of Brasov (13th – 20th centuries) [in Romanian] (Sibiu: Ed. Andreiana, 2010), 334.

² Ibid., 331.

³ Florica Dimitrescu, The Four Gospels Printed by Coresi – Brasov 1560-1561 [in Romanian] (București: Ed. Academiei, 1963), 167.

⁴ Annamaria Baci, The Mural Painting Restoration as Generator of Cultural Information [in Romanian] (Cluj-Napoca: Grinta, 2011), 79.

DEACON CORESI'S IMAGE IN HISTORY'S RECORDS



Deacon Coreși, statue in Saint Nicholas "The Church Yard, The First Romanian School of Brașov", Piața Unirii, Brașov



Bust, deacon Coreși in the Museum

The records of those times and also the restoration results reveal that one year later, in 1940, the entire painting was covered with a layer of paint so as to conceal the role of the Transylvanian scholars; over the years, other layers were added until in 1999, after restoration, they were scraped off the painting and the work of art was given back to the public in its original form. Thus, the painting in the Great Hall of the Universitarilor Palace was severely degraded by this covering method and we now consider that it would have been more proper to choose the same approach used for the Romanian Athenaeum, where the fresco created by the same artist was covered with red velvet during communism (from 1948 to 1966) so as to hide the monarchy's role in Romania's history.



*Detail – upper parts of the monumental painting by Costin Petrescu,
Great Hall, Universitarilor Palace, Cluj-Napoca*

Costin Petrescu⁵, painter, university professor and publicist chose the *fresco* technique – specific for mural painting – for a large area of this work of

⁵ Artist Costin Petrescu had a close relationship with painting starting from an early age, as both his father and grandfather had been artisan painters. He graduated from the School of Belle Arte and the Architecture School from Bucharest and studied abroad in Vienna, Munich and Paris and in 1921 he studied banknote engraving methods in USA. Between the two world wars Costin Petrescu painted a series of portraits of cultural personalities such as Gheorghe Lazăr, Vasile Lascăr and Dem I. Dobrescu, reaching a total number of about 400 portraits. One of his representative works is the monumental composition in the Romanian Athenaeum, also known as the greatest work of art made in Romania in the fresco technique up to that point, for the completion of which he worked for approximately five years, until 1939 and which comprises 25 scenes representative for Romania's

art, while for the lower part he used the technique of oil on plaster made of lime and gypsum⁶. This lower area, a narrow one, but covering the same length with the one made in the fresco technique, displays the *legend* of the composition situated on the upper part, where characters are placed in chronological sequence from left to right, starting from deacon Coresi, on the same vertical axis with Sava Brancovici, the Metropolitan Bishop of Ardeal.



Detail from the monumental painting by Costin Petrescu, Great Hall, Universitarilor Palace, Cluj-Napoca

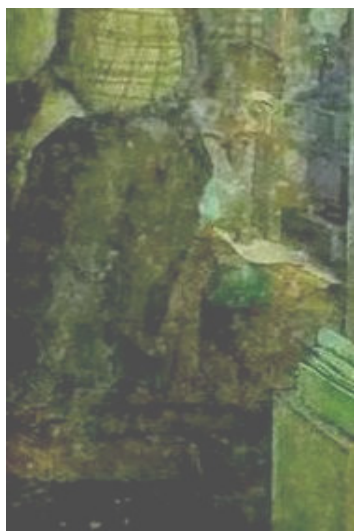
Coresi, famous character in the Transylvanian culture, appears in both painting areas mentioned above, on the left side. Sitting on a humble chair, wearing a tunic and a coat over his shoulders, with his head covered by a hood and slightly bent forward, as if in a gesture of profound piety, all these suggest his involvement and commitment in rendering the liturgical texts that he printed. The deacon's portrait was painted according to his real features, with a short beard, in colours limited to greyish shades with light tones at the collar and the sleeves⁷.

history. Other large size mural paintings created by him are those in the churches from Miroși, the Royal Church from Curtea de Argeș, Saint Sylvester, Mihai Vodă and „Saint Dumitru – Colentina” of Bucharest but also in the “Saint Nicholas” church from Șcheii Brașovului. He also painted some scenes in the Patriarchal Palace and inside the Coronation Cathedral in Alba Iulia, he designed the royal cape that King Ferdinand wore on October, 15, 1922 at his coronation in Iași, he made the outdoor mosaics at the Romanian Athenaeum in Bucharest. Costin Petrescu died in Bucharest on October, 15, 1954. [https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Costin_Petrescu_\(pictor\)](https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Costin_Petrescu_(pictor))

⁶ Baci, The Mural Painting Restoration, 80.

⁷ The order of Canon 27 of the Seventh Ecumenical Synod stipulates “Clothes worn by clerical people (outside the religious services) ought to be long and as much as possible dark, because length represents decency and dark colors (black or gray) are the symbol of humility.” Ioan N. Floca, *Acc. to Canons of the Orthodox Church. Notes and comments* [in Romanian] (București: Sophia, 2005).

Next to deacon Coresi, Costin Petrescu accurately depicted his appeal for printing by capturing the gesture of feeding the paper to the press, the paper sheets on a desk and the printing press where the collected texts were taking shape. All these *symbol – elements* make Coresi an important member of this monumental composition.



*Details form the upper part of the composition
“Cultural History of Transylvania”, by Costin Petrescu, 1939,
Great Hall, Universitarilor Palace, Cluj-Napoca.*

The stylistic approach of the painting, with wide strokes and a sober colour palette in the upper part, is in contrast with the lower part where all the personalities' portraits are rendered by a schematic drawing with a cobalt blue simple line, on an ochre background with golden geometrical shapes and approximately in the same position as in the upper part. On this film of colour, under each portrait, the name of the depicted person appears and this enables the understanding of the upper composition, which comprises the portraits of the most representative scholars in Transylvania in the period 16th century – 19th century, as follows: Metropolitan Bishop Simion Ștefan, Archpriest Radu Tempea, Paul Iorgovici, Cantor Dimitrie Eustatievici, Bishop Ioan Inocențiu Micu, Gheorghe Șincai, Petru Maior, C. Diaconovici Loga, Ion Molnar Piuariu, I. Budai Deleanu, Priest Samuil Micu, Bishop Vasile Moga, Andrei Mureșanu, Ștefan Octavian Iosif, George Coșbuc, Metropolitan Bishop Andrei Șaguna, Octavian Goga, Gheorghe Barițiu, Gheorghe Pop de Băsești, Vasile Goldiș, Simion Bărnuțiu and Timotei Cipariu.

Although considered by some as a slide to heresy, Coresi's work was facilitated by the fact that Romanian priests understood this revolutionary act of introducing the Romanian language in the cult, much in the same way protestant confessions emerging at the time did⁸. Printed texts in Romanian defeated time and led the way to the orthodox cult nationalisation and the development of the Romanian language.

Together with other craftsmen-merchants, Coresi set up the typography in Brasov, where he printed, after Filip the Moldavian- typographer in Sibiu, a series of books in Romanian, thus highlighting the victory of printed writings on the Romanian land. Lucian Blaga refers to his first printed texts as being in fact "the first great poem of the nation", although "The Scripture was already known, read, translated, explained in Romanian orally and in writing"⁹, considering that *the language had already been formed for centuries* in our country when Slavonic appeared, said Mihai Eminescu.

The Transylvanian Saxon chronicler Simon Massa (+1605) wrote that the first books in Romanian (The Catechism of 1544, The Christian question of 1559) had "*reformed the Wallachian Church*", and Nicolae Iorga said that the appearance of these printed texts is due to the Hussite influence in Ardeal and that their translation was made in the north, i.e. in Maramureș, in the second half of the 15th century¹⁰. Alexandru Rosetti also states that the first translations in Romanian were made in Maramures in the first half of the 16th century under the influence of Luther's reform.¹¹

As a text translator or translation reviser, Coresi has been studied and is still under the attention of our researchers of old literature. Among the Romanian philologists who researched the Coresi phenomenon, we can mention academician Nicolae Corlateanu in the 20th century, who captured in his work important aspects about the beginnings of Romanian writings in his Bachelor thesis named: *Linguistic Relations between the "Codex of Voronet and Coresi's Apostolic Work (1563)"*, research that highlights the spiritual unity and the written word's triumph in Romanian, and the introduction of the spoken language in writing and in the Church.

These old writings represent the expression of the Romanian nation's spirituality and arouse interest "especially for history and for the evolution of

⁸ Mircea Păcuraru, *Sibiu's Scholars from the Past* [in Romanian] (Cluj-Napoca: Dacia, 2002), 8.

⁹ Antonie Plămădeală, *Teachers of Romanian Thought and Feeling* [in Romanian] (Bucharest, 1981), 67.

¹⁰ N. Iorga, *History of Romania's Religious Literature up to 1688* [in Romanian] (Bucharest, 1904), 18-19.

¹¹ Al. Rosetti, *The Romanian Language Between the 13th and the 16th Centuries* [in Romanian] (Bucharest, 1956), 181.

culture, being able to help establishing the coordinates of former people's mentality and way of thinking"¹². Our old books have been kept in places inhabited by Romanians. The results of Coresi's praiseworthy typographic activity underlined the cultural progress unanimously appreciated by historians, philologists and theologians.

After almost a quarter century worth of effort, Coresi marked in history through his creation, a heroic age for the promotion of our national culture, period rightfully called "*The Coresi era*" with the first books in Romanian: *Christian Question or Romanian Catechism* (1559), *Little Octoechos of Brasov* (1557), *Pentecostarion Triodon* (1558), *The Gospel Book* (1561), *The Romanian Apostle* (1563), *The Gospel Significance and the Euchologion* (1564), *The Psalter* (1568), *The Romanian Psalm Book* (1570), *The Gospel Book with Moral* (1581), *Romanian Litourgicon* (1570) and *The Rule of Saint Fathers* issued between 1570-1580, then Slavic- Romanian: *The Psalter* of 1577 and *The Gospel Book* of 1580¹³. These books meant for all the orthodox around the world and also the Slavonic ones printed by Coresi, can be found in libraries in orthodox countries in the Balkans and in the monasteries on Mount Athos.

Historians specialized in our old culture, such as A. Lanbrior, A.D. Xenopol, Al. Rosetti state that "Romanians have written in all periods in their language"¹⁴ and Coresi's apostolic work from the second half of the 16th century was a correction and an improvement for the benefit of Romanians and of the Church, especially through the printed books referring to orthodoxy which have brought a great contribution to the Romanian orthography. Coresi's image and reforming work in the church is worth researching, as the struggle of keeping the ancestral faith alive could not have been successful but through presenting the dogma in the language known by people¹⁵.

Due to this fact, he is ranked by the specialists in the field as the first cleric typographer of Romanian books who committed to "settling the homiliary in the readings of literate Romanians"¹⁶ and was named "the father of Romanian

¹² Florian Dudaș, *Memory of Old Romanian Books* [in Romanian] (Oradea: Ed. Episcopiei Ortodoxe din Oradea, 1990), 11.

¹³ Oltean, *Historical and Religious Configuration of Brasov* (13th – 20th centuries), 332

¹⁴ A. Lambrior, *Literary Conversations*, XV, no. 15 (1981): 127.

¹⁵ "In the holy church t is bett'r to sayeth five w'rds with meaning than ten thousand w'rds in a f'reign language, not und'rstood" or ," And because I readeth and did see yond ev'rything explains, c'rrob'rate and endeth'rses the Holy Bible, I did like t v'ry much and I wroteth w'rds with the printing presseth f'r thee, Romanian broth'rs, so thee can learneth from these and I asketh thee to readeth and contemplate because thee shall seeth t f'r yourselves those art the jewel and thee shall findeth in those a hidden treasure....." , Coresi, *The Gospel Significance and the Euchologion* [in Romanian], ed. Vladimir Drâmba (București: Ed. Academiei, 1998), 187.

¹⁶ Dudaș, *Memory of Old Romanian Books* [in Romanian], 18.

literature"¹⁷, the one who promoted Romanian to the rank of "the language of culture"¹⁸ and "publisher of books for brothers from everywhere"¹⁹, the man who separated words in writing, as they had been written linked to one another until then.

The first book printed by Coresi in Romanian *Christian Question* from 1559 is acknowledged as document of Romanian language. We quote from it the *Lord's Prayer*, remarking that the differences compared to the modern language are almost insignificant: „ Our father, whyche art in heaven, halowed be thy name. Thy Kyngdome come thy wyll be doen in yearth, as it is in heaven. Geve us this daye our nurturing breade. And forgeve us our trespasses, as wee forgeve them that trespassed agaynst us. and leade us not into temptacion but deliver us from evill for thyne is the kingdom and the power, and the glorie for ever, Amen"²⁰. We notice that typographer Coresi used "the old Romanian manuscripts with certain modifications that he brought so as to confer the language the scent of that age"²¹, contributing thus to creating a unitary literary language and to developing the culture and society they lived in.

The reputable Metropolitan Bishop Antonie Plămădeală of Ardeal, when analysing the phrase "With God's mercy, I, deacon Coresi ...", stated that Coresi made a "touching royal, triumphal, solemn entrance into the history of the Romanian printed words. It is like he would have said: *We, Mircea Voivode* on a royal document, or much like a bishop in the foreword of a most significant pastoral book"²². Furthermore, if we look at the work printed by Coresi as a whole, we can place him among the first preachers of national unity by language and of the Latin origin of Romanians, because he used to translate the term *Roman* by *Rumanian*²³. At the same time, Șerban Coresi, his youngest son, editor of the book *The Old Testament from Orastie*²⁴, is the person who wrote for the first time, researchers assert, the term *Romanian*, thus "proclaiming the origins of Romanians who descended from the Romans"²⁵.

Beyond the wish of perpetuating deacon Coresi's memory and the will of creating a historical image through the various written or plastic representations,

¹⁷ Dan Simionescu, "Points of View...", [in Romanian], *The Church's Voice*, no. 4 (1958): 348.

¹⁸ George Ivașcu, *History of Romanian Literature*, 1: 240.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁰ *Apud* Barbu Teodorescu, "Coresi's Personality and His Role in the Romanian Culture" [in Romanian], *The Romanian Orthodox Church's Magazine*, no. 3-4 (1959): 288.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 290.

²² Plămădeală, *Teachers of Romanian Thought and Feeling*, 69.

²³ G. Giuglea, "Coresi establishes the first connection between 'Roman' and 'Rumanian'," *Biserica Ortodoxă Română*, no. 5-6 (1935): 226-228.

²⁴ Nerva Hodiș, "A Fragment from Deacon Coresi's Euchologion" [in Romanian], in *Tribute to D.A. Sturza* (Bucharest, 1906), 236.

²⁵ *History of Romanian Literature* [in Romanian] (București: Ed. Academiei, 1964), 1: 246.

the most remarkable typographer's portrait is ubiquitous in Romania's culture. His activity as a typographer reaches another level in the 17th century due to the royal figures' involvement by means of the donations made for texts and books written in Romanian and for the cultural life of Transylvania, Moldova and Wallachia, climaxing with the issuing of the New Testament in 1648 at Alba Iulia, and the Bible in 1688 in Bucharest.

Coresi's image, known biographically from the brief monographies dedicated to him, manages to express his personality as a scholar and a deacon descending from a Greek family that lived in Wallachia²⁶, a man who took care of building a church in the capital of this region, Targoviste, with craftsmen brought from Brasov²⁷.

This remarkable and valuable person whose statute has been captured in written documents or fine arts portrayals, opened *the way for writing in Romanian*, and the Coresian image has been known and appreciated, especially starting from the 18th century until now, due to researches in the field of history, theology and fine arts. 2016 has been declared by the Saint Synod of the Romanian Orthodox Church also the commemorative year of religious typographers, one of whom is Coresi, depicted in this article aiming to highlight the Coresian image.



The Apostle, 1566, by Coresi

²⁶ Ovid Densusăianu, *History of Romanian Literature* [in Romanian] (Iași, 1894), 199.

²⁷ Ion Bogdan, *Documents and Records Regarding the Relationship between Wallachia and Brasov and Hungary in the 10th and 16th century* [in Romanian] (București, 1902), 233.

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